Part Two: City's second City Hall a part of present building

(Editor's Note: This is the second in a series of articles by S. Robert Powell of Carbondale on the history of Carbondale's three City Halls that will be published in the NEWS.)

Following the fire on February 14, 1869, in which Carbondale's first City Hall (a wooden building) was destroyed, a two-story, brick City Hall was erected. This building, erected during the administration of Mayor Joseph B. Van Bergen, served as Carbondale's City Hall from 1869 up to the time when Carbondale's third City Hall (the present building) was erected in 1892-1894.

Carbondale's second City Hall is still standing in downtown Carbondale. Where is it? It is the two-story wing at the back of the present City Hall. Here is what happened: When Truman I. Lacey of Binghamton, N.Y., designed the present City Hall in 1892, he incorporated Carbondale's second City Hall into his overall design for the new building. In order to do so, he designed a new interior and a new roof for the old building, and then had the old building joined to his new building.

The contractor who, in 1894, executed Lacey's design for the new interior and the new roof of the old building and who joined its eastern side to the new building (at a cost of $3,500) was George H. Tryon of Carbondale. Tryon was engaged by Lacey to do this job when the contractor who erected the three-story wing and the tower of the present-day City Hall, G. D. Stevens of Binghamton, ceased work on his contract in the fall of 1893.

The 1869 City Hall had two stories. Lacey's design for the 1892-1894 City Hall called for the addition of a third story to the old City Hall. In accordance with Lacey's plan, construction on the proposed third story was begun in late 1893. When the City Council drew up the budget for 1894, however, no funds were allocated for the completion of the third story on the old City Hall. As a result, construction on the third story was halted.

The partially built third story can be seen today beneath the present roof on the two-story wing of Carbondale City Hall.

Carbondale's second City Hall, like its predecessor, was a rectangular Greek Revival building. Five slender vertical rectangular windows on each story on the north and south sides of the rectangle; three vertical rectangular windows on the second story of the eastern side, and two vertical rectangular windows, plus a door in the left bay, on the ground level of the eastern side. Although it is not known for certain, it is likely that there were three vertical rectangular windows on each story of the western side of the building.

The windows on the northern and southern sides of the two-story wing of present-day City Hall, with their greystone lintels and scrolls, are the original windows of the 1869 City Hall. The dentil molding that can be seen today at the level of the eaves on the two-story wing of City Hall is that of the old City Hall.

What about the roof of the 1869 City Hall? Given the aesthetic requirements of the Greek Revival style of architecture, as well as the proportions of the old City Hall, we could easily guess what the original roof on the 1869 City Hall looked like, were we forced to do so. No guessing is necessary, however, in this case. The original beams of the roof of the 1869 City Hall are intact beneath the present roof on the two-story wing of City Hall. In order to conform with the style of the three-story wing and the tower of present-day City Hall, the roof that was installed by Lacey in 1894 on the 1869 building was raked at a much sharper angle than the original roof on that building.

What about the interior of the old City Hall? We know that the vaults that extended through both stories on the two-story wing were not in the 1869 building.

This we know because these vaults, for the safekeeping of the records of the mayor, the city treasurer, and the city engineer, were installed by George H. Tryon. In April, 1894, Tryon's workmen began digging the foundation for these vaults, which cost $2,000 to install. On September 4, 1894, the bid of $970 by the Fenton Metallic Manufacturing Company to equip the vaults with steel cases was accepted by the City Council, and the steel file cases were installed shortly thereafter.

The following changes to the 1869 building were also made in 1894: (1) the main hallway on the second floor was narrowed eight feet; (2) a stairway was eliminated and replaced by an entrance to the station house; (3) the city engineer's office was divided by a partition; and (4) the court room was replastered. During this remodeling, the city treasurer moved, on April 3, 1894, from his office in the 1869 building to the first story tower room in the new building.

We can visualize what the 1869 City Hall looked like then, by imagining the present two-story wing of City Hall minus the interior and exterior modifications, described above, that were carried out in 1894 by George H. Tryon, in accordance with Truman I. Lacey's design for the new building.

The 1869 City Hall served as the seat of the executive and administrative branches of the city government from 1869 to 1894. It was in this building too, that the Mayor's Court sat from 1869 to December 31, 1875, when it was dissolved. Various rooms in this building, in addition, served as the town meeting hall, concert hall, and public lecture hall. Important local societies and clubs (the Lackawanna Club, the Lackawanna Medical Society) also held their meetings in this building. The present City Council Chambers are located on the second floor, north side of the hall, of what was Carbondale's second City Hall.

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Published with this article is a photograph that was taken on 12-17-1981 at the meeting of the Committee to Restore Carbondale City Hall in City Council Chambers.